

Preparing for a competency-based, Learning From Experience (LFE), interview

If you are unfamiliar with a competency-based LFE interview it will likely strike you as unusual. The following is information that is useful in helping you to prepare.

Competencies are not a substitute for technical knowledge. They are behavioral traits that have been identified as essential for success in specific jobs or positions. Candidates are evaluated on a variety of elements in the selection process, e.g. competencies, technical expertise, work history, and references. By the time a candidate reaches the interview stage, they've been rated as among the best qualified for the job or position.

There is a repetitive pattern to each of the interview questions in a competency-based interview. It goes like this:

Tell us about a time when...

This is usually an event that all of the candidates are likely to have experienced. You'll be asked to describe a specific situation that falls into this category. Your experience can be work-related or an event from your personal life.

Subsequent questions, or probes, are as follows.

1. How did you approach it? What were the steps you took?
2. Why did you do it that way?
3. What did you learn from the experience?
4. How have you used what you've learned since then?

That's it.

Your answers to these questions are used to gauge the extent of your possession of the competency. The interview panel will be basing their evaluation only on the information you provide in the interview.

When the panel member asks you to tell them about an event, take a minute to organize your thoughts. The panel is not expecting you to

be able to immediately relate an event from your past that you had not prepared to discuss. Take enough time to recall a specific situation.

When thinking back to an event, try to pick one that caused you to form a “rule of thumb.” A situation or event that you look back on and wish you’d handled differently is a great example. This is because most people tend to learn more from their mistakes than from successes.

As you formulate your description of the event, keep in mind the follow-up questions. You don’t need to memorize them and pattern your discussion around them specifically; the panel members will prompt you for them in the course of the interview. Try to use a situation that lends itself to the pattern of subsequent probes.

During a traditional interview, we’re used to “selling” ourselves – detailing our attributes and successes. The competency interview is not designed to rate those elements. The competency interview is intended to gauge the possession of the competencies necessary for the position. It isn’t important that the final result was either positive or negative. Only how you approached it, what you learned, and how you’ve applied what you learned since then.

In conclusion, there is no sure-fire way to prepare for a competency-based interview. The best you can do is to take some time to look back and review events in your past that were significant in forming your own personal “rules of thumb” that apply to the subject competencies.